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ABSTRACT

An introductory course on Latin America is probably the only course most college students will take on that region. It provides the best opportunity for influencing the educated public about the area. There is an urgent need to increase understanding of Latin America because so much of the American public, including public officials, are so uninformed about the area. A recommended strategy for a one-quarter introductory course entitled "Latin America: Reform and Revolution" is guided by three basic strategies: an emphasis on present conditions in Latin America, an attempt to foster a Latin American perspective among the students, and a dialectic approach focusing on civilization vs. barbarism and North Atlantic culture vs. indigenous folk culture. To help foster sensitivity to Latin America, use is made of regionally produced films, fiction, and fictional documentaries. Eight films and 6 books are required for the course, which also includes 3 weekly lectures and a 50-minute discussion section. Topics covered in the course include Asians in the Western Hemisphere, the 1910 uprising in Mexico, the establishment of Iberian institutions in the New World, land and labor, Latin American challenge to European institutions, and major revolutions. Students are required to write three essays on topics of their choice and take a final essay examination. (LP)

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THE FINE ART OF SYNTHESIS: LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY FOR FRESHMEN

The introduction to Latin American history ranks as the most important course our field offers. It is probably the single course most of its enrollees will ever take in Latin American history. Thus, for them, it serves as both introduction and conclusion. Very importantly, then, the course provides those of us who teach it with our best opportunity to influence that amorphous group called the educated public, that group which will be able to read about Latin America with some insight, talk about it with some evidence of wisdom, and, perhaps, even shape or influence U.S. attitudes and policies with some degree of sensitivity and intelligence. It should instill in us---those most knowledgeable about the Latin American past---the historical and social responsibility to explain to our students the meaning of Latin America, an explanation framed in historical terms.

An urgent need for this explanation exists. Not only is the public at large abysmally ignorant about Latin America, but, more inexcusably, so are the highest officials of this land, the ones who make policies affecting not only us

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but the Latin Americans as well. Ignorance on the part of the public is lamentable; on the part of our officials it can be disastrous. When one of our presidents made the public discovery during an official trip to South America that the nations there differ from one another, we, the teachers of Latin American history, realized the great educational task confronting us. When the same president classified the government of Fidel Castro as a "fascist regime" and praised the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras for their chosen course of "freedom, pluralism, and free economic development," we understood, perhaps with a somewhat heavy heart, the educational challenge before us. That challenge begins in our introductory course, where we have the opportunity to discuss the major social, economic, and political forces that both contribute to illuminating the past and to explaining the present.

We can meet the challenge by positively influencing our students to recognize the importance of a knowledge of Latin America, thereby creating a desire to learn more about the region, to understand the region. Or, through a dull, perfunctory, ill-focused course, we can drive them away from our fascinating subject, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of ignorance about Latin America.

The second reason I believe the introductory course is our most important emerges from the splendid opportunity it affords to encourage students to take other courses about

Latin America. By exciting their curiosity, we can hope that some or many of them will elect to take more specific, more complex, and more advanced courses. A lively introductory course thereby sustains other Latin American history courses to the degree it impresses upon the students a need and a desire to seek more information. An intellectually stimulating survey course also provides the broad context into which the more advanced courses can be meaningfully fitted.

A third reason for its importance concerns our own professional and personal development. An intelligent survey for our students requires of the profession an artful exercise in the analysis, interpretation and synthesis of a boundless array of information. The introductory course requires its professor to review an impressive army of books and essays and then to marshal them into some sort of order while extracting meaning from them. In the process, the professor must become the master of comparative history, knowledgeable of all its strengths, yet wary of its many weaknesses. If the challenge does not crush the practitioners, it can exhilerate them for there is a marvellous opportunity to deal with ideas projected on a vast historical and intellectual screen. Here the Latin American historian can escape the narrow confines of monographic research and writing to liberate the imagination in order to assign

meaning to a vast topic. In short, teaching of the survey requires synthesis. The ability to synthesize has become an increasingly rare talent in our profession. Responding to the challenge of synthesis can enliven our profession; it can also benefit students who seek, need, and appreciate a cogent understanding of the broad sweep of the Latin American past.

A subsidiary reward arises from the student response to a well planned and taught survey. Frequently the survey is the first academic introduction of the student to the area of Latin America and to its history. In a well taught survey, the enthusiasm of students aroused by their introduction to the Latin American past transmits an intellectual stimulus, perhaps even an intellectual renewal, to the professor in charge. It is the satisfaction received from having introduced others to something worthwhile and from sensing their appreciation, even excitement. Furthermore, students whose new knowledge fills them with enthusiasm are likely to convey their discoveries and conclusions to others. They carry the discussion of Latin America to yet a wider audience.

Twenty years of teaching the survey and student reaction to it have shaped and reshaped my approaches to it. The ways of presenting an introductory course are infinite.

I will dwell on the formula I have found most satisfying during the past decade in teaching a lower-division introduction entitled Latin America: Reform or Revolution, a one quarter, ten week, thirty lecture course that spans 40,000 years of history in the diverse Caribbean, Middle America, and South American regions.

In addition to the thrice weekly lectures, the students participate in a weekly fifty-minute discussion section guided by an advanced PhD candidate in Latin American history. The teaching assistants help the students integrate the texts and films with the weekly lecture topics. With its group of ten to twenty students, each section provides an opportunity to develop and exchange ideas.

In the Fall Quarter of 1983, I abandoned the mid-term exam in favor of requiring three essays. They provide students an opportunity to explore topics of their choice based on the six books and eight films used in the course. A three-hour essay exam concluded the survey.

What kind of students sign up for an introductory course like this? Both a large and heterogeneous clientele enrolls. During the past decade, enrollments have varied between 150 and 200 with no way to explain or to predict why one year the number might be closer to 150 than to 200. In a College of Letters and Science in which only 4% of the students are Hispanics, I find my class composed of 20-30%;

while the blacks represent 5% of the student body, they are 6-10% of this class.

In the fall of 1981, when I last took an inventory of the majors represented in a class of 180 students, I discovered twenty-five different majors in the social sciences, humanities, physical sciences, and life sciences as well as students from the fine arts, nursing, and engineering schools. The largest number, 36, was "undeclared," which is to say those students had not yet selected their major. History majors constituted only one out of every five students in the course. By the way, the UCLA College of Letters and Science requires no history courses for graduation.

The self-imposed time constraint of one-quarter requires the introductory course to move swiftly. The first four weeks cover the period between the arrival of hungry Asians in the Western Hemisphere in search of food to the uprising in 1910 of hungry Mexicans in pursuit of land. In those lectures, I emphasize the establishment of Iberian institutions in the New World, their growth and modification during the colonial period, as well as their invigoration during the nineteenth century. I am particularly concerned with those institutions related to land and labor. The material in the final six weeks of the course attempts to convey an understanding of why some Latin Americans challenge those

institutions and how they would change them. The class examines five revolutionary attempts to substitute new institutions for the old and five or six attempts at reforming the inherited institutions by democratic or populist or military governments.

Three major philosophical inclinations shape my teaching of the lower division survey course. The first is a propensity toward presentism. The course begins in 1983 with a litany of the problems and crises besetting contemporary Latin America. The first lecture posits the enigma that poor people inhabit potentially rich lands. This enigma startles, puzzles, even disturbs the students. They want an explanation. Once they vocalize that request, the course flashes back to the Indian and colonial pasts in order to search for some explanations. Particularly for this introductory course, I consider it imperative to explain the present in terms of the past, a choice that requires a selective review of the past.

Philosophically I feel most comfortable with this presentist approach. It so happens, at least in my experience , that the presentist approach also speaks most directly to the students' valid concerns and interests. This past quarter when I queried twenty students by means of a questionnaire about their reasons for enrolling in an introductory Latin American history course, most dwelt on their perception that history provides a means to understand

the present and prepare for the future. Although none used the terms "presentist" or "presentism," their remarks pointed to their sympathy with that historical approach. It certainly is one compatible with our discipline. Furthermore and very importantly, this approach suggests to students how history can provide explanations for a fuller understanding of the present. Thus, history assumes a practical and immediate characteristic that some of the students, mired in the dates and names routine, had not considered possible.

The second approach is through a dialectic, present in various guises throughout the course. Occasionally it hides behind the perennial favorite of civilization versus barbarism, or the North Atlantic cultures versus the Latin American folk cultures; sometimes it takes on the frankly social science concern of modernization versus tradition or the changeless versus the changing; at other times it assumes the bold economic form of development versus growth. All of these, you readily understand, involve conflict. Conflict heightens drama. This drama, in my opinion, provides the basis for an interpretation of Latin America.

An introductory course providing such a rapid overview of the complex Latin American past must emphasize the significant themes and deal only with the major forces. Specific details appear only when they illustrate a generality. The survey course is a vast canvas on which broad brush strokes show up best.

Thirdly, to the extent possible in this introductory course, I think students should be exposed to the Latin American perspective. They should be aware of how the Latin Americans view and have viewed themselves, how they interpret their own past, how they envision their own future. In a society such as ours which is inwardly oriented, unquestioningly self-satisfied, and filled with more than a little sense of mission to impose our life styles on others, it is imperative to stress the Latin American ethos as the Latin Americans themselves interpret it, as a contrast to how we perceive it.

Depending upon the resourcefulness of the professor and the local resources available, there are a number of ways to accomplish this somewhat elusive goal. Guest lecturers are one. Certainly Latin Americans pass through our large cities. The Fulbright Commission publishes a list of the Latin American scholars teaching in the United States under its auspices in any given year. Most faculties include at least one Latin American, often in the Spanish Deparmtent. Learned and articulate guests should be invited or coaxed into the classroom to talk about their own societies. I vividly recall the excitement in the classroom when I presented President Víctor Paz Estenssoro as a guest lecturer and on a later occasion President José Figueres. In those exceptional instances, the students could learn

about history from those who helped to make it. On a somewhat less exalted level, a businessman or even a humble professor can provide a perspective that rarely fails to interest students.

Films, fictional or non-fictional, made by Latin Americans provide yet another means to view the region through local eyes. While the non-fictional documentary offers the more conventional link between film and history, I have been drawn to the fictional documentary much as I have to the novel and for many of the same reasons. It expands the use of historical imagination and sharpens interpretive skills.

Time, space, people, factual exposition, causation, and interpretation are the ingredients compounded by historians. They are also the essential components of the successful fictional documentaries produced in Latin America. The historian and the fictional documentary filmmaker share much in common. The more recent generations of Latin American filmmakers, particularly active between 1960 and 1975, stress social realism and causation. To varying degrees, they also dwell on the roles of humble people in society. Interweaving art and politics, they highlight the crises of contemporary society. Their films analyze, discuss, and illustrate pressing social and economic problems and sometimes provide or suggest possible solutions to them. They contribute to our knowledge of Latin America, while

providing the Latin American perspective. We can use these films as documents to illuminate the past and to better understand the present. For example, I have used and found effective Humberto Solás' Lucia (1968) as a study of women's roles in society, Antonio Eguinos' Chuquiago (1977) to illustrate the problems and realities of rapid urbanization and class stratification, Jorge Sanjinés' Blood of the Condor (1969) to appreciate both the position of Indians in contemporary society and cultural conflict, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos' Barren Lives (1963) for the insight it provides into the lives of the peasantry. In my opinion, the most penetrating introduction to the nineteenth-century history of Latin America can be found on film: Gillo Pontecorvo's masterpiece, Burn! (1969). I hasten to add that in this particular case a European rather than a Latin American has captured the essence of historical interpretation.

Three aspects of the filmic document should concern the students as they draw meaning from it. First, they analyze the film's treatment of reality, raising a series of questions such as what are the realities to which this film addresses itself; does it convincingly depict them; what depth of reality does it provide; can the filmmaker's concept of reality be accepted; and does his version of reality clash with reality as the viewer conceives it or is aware of it?

Second, the students should understand various levels of the film's meaning: factual, emotional, and interpretive. Here students must extract meaning from dialogue and images. At its simplest, a film can be just an arrangement of a series of images, each with its own significance and meaning. Few films are that elementary. Most require intellectual involvement, an intense, active participation from the students who relate the images to one another, to their own experiences, and to the dialogue in an effort to understand the objective, meaning, purpose, and significance of the film. Finally, each student must assess the value of the film for himself/herself. Reflecting a variety of experiences, each viewer will subjectively assign different values, or no value, to film. As the students' skill in using the image develops, they will be extracting data at various levels. Then, perhaps, they will appreciate Carl Sandburg's wry observation: all movies good or bad are educational and Hollywood is a more effective educational institution than Harvard.

Generally student raction to fictional documentaries has been enthusiastic. The young people recognize and appreciate the importance of film and seem to embrace it with a sigh of relief that it has finally been accorded recognition as a transmitter of knowledge. I have two caveats. First, the professors must select films they know, have studied,

and feel comfortable with as documents. Second, they must fully and seriously incorporate the filmic document into the course by discussing it, referring to it in lectures, assigning papers on it, and including it in the exams. Any other treatment telegraphs to the students the message that film is entertainment with little relevance to the course.

Happily, the past few decades witnessed the translation into English and publication of an impressive number of books by Latin Americans. They contribute mightily to getting the Latin American viewpoint into our courses. The Seven Interpretive Essays by José Carlos Mariátegui never fails to stimulate discussion; nor have Domingo F. Sarmiento's Civilization and Barbarism or Euclydes da Cunha's Rebellion in the Backlands. These meaty books of insight and revelation challenge the students. Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos, José Honório Rodrigues, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso offer contemporary interpretations of the Mexican, Brazilian, and Latin American pasts that prompt the North American readers to expand their vision. These brilliant Latin American intellectuals earn student respect and force their young North American audience to realize that the Latin Americans have a provocative view of themselves, one far beyond the simplicities and stereotypes that characterize U.S. thought about Latin America.

I have been particularly pleased with the student response to the use of novels. Jorge Amado's The Violent Land, Gregorio López y Fuentes' El Indio, Miguel Angel Asturias' El Señor Presidente, and Graciliano Ramos' Barren Lives have proven to be invaluable documents to study salient aspects of the Latin American past. The recent brilliant translation of Manlio Argueta's overpowering novel One Day of Life says more about the impact of totalitarian government on the lives of the humble citizenry than half a hundred social science monographs could ever hope to. The inclusion of one of these novels in the survey's reading list provides the students with a sensitive Latin American insight, expands the historical imagination of the students, and introduces them to the most exciting literature being written in the world today.

These suggestions embrace some of the obvious ways in which the Latin American viewpoint can be introduced into the survey course. The goal is of primary importance: we must sensitize our students to the Latin American perspective. But other benefits accrue. An introduction to the Latin American novel as well as film cultivates both an awareness and appreciation of art forms that can be experienced for their historical value as well as their own artistic merit.

I do not pretend to exhaust the ways teachers might introduce their students to the Latin Americans' statements

about themselves. Poetry, music, architecture, and folklore are other possibilities. Reading Dr. Anya Peterson Royce's The Anthropology of Dance alerted me to the intriguing idea of using movement as a source of insight. Obviously each of us will feel comfortable with different combinations of the myriad sources that reveal the incredible richness of Latin American expression.

My experiences as both a student and a teacher suggest several characteristics a fast-paced, meaningful, and intellectually stimulating introductory course must avoid. In this course, we must subordinate the monographic and statistical to the general and the interpretive. Nothing numbs the mind more quickly than the repetitive country-by-country historical resumes that all too often pass for the national history of Latin America. Certainly the textbooks of yesterday afflicted that boredom and general meaninglessness on generations of students. We must rescue future generations from that travesty.

Our goals must be clear as we synthesize the material for our introductory course: to introduce our students to a fascinating region and people; to instruct them in the salient themes of the history of Latin America; and to interest them in continuing their pursuit of an understanding of Latin America. Effective teaching combines knowledge, vision, and insight with enthusiasm. Regardless of how well

organized the survey course is, how fascinating its reading list, and how provocative the guest speakers and films are, it also requires an exciting teacher, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the topics to be presented. It is difficult to arouse the students' enthusiasm to study the Latin American past if the professor conveys little enthusiasm either for the subject or the task at hand. Boredom and routine are as infectious as enthusiasm.

Mumbling may be curable. I noticed in a recent issue of Columbia an attractive ad that ordered, "Be a Superb Communicator!" The blurb promised, "Develop ease, confidence, talking to 1, 10, or 1000 in person, on radio or TV. Learn to think on your feet, deal with antagonism." The curious reader was invited to request from CHARISMEDIA a new book by Doe Lang, The Secret of Charisma. An appropriate footnote in the ad informed, "Not since Max Weber invented political charisma has there been as useful a how-to book on the subject."

Charisma may be a bit too strong a classroom device for the professor, but more and more universities and colleges are offering help to those who want to improve their speaking and/or teaching skills. The brutal realities imparted by a TV taping often provide the essential shock therapy which can be the first step toward the improvement of lecturing.

Our survey courses require from their teachers at least a satisfactory presentation of the material; but, hopefully, if they eschew charisma, they will at least reveal knowledge and enthusiasm for Latin American history.

To a degree larger than we have been willing to acknowledge, we ourselves---not events or moods of the times---influence the future of the study of Latin American history. If we are to exercise that influence we must successfully ply our teaching profession. The first and perhaps the most important impetus to a renaissance of the undergraduate study of Latin American history lies in the rethinking of the purpose and goals of the introductory course. We can take our cue from the pithy remark of Oscar Wilde: "Our only duty to history is to rewrite it." The second impetus requires the reinvigoration of the teaching of it. More students are enrolled in our colleges and universities than ever before. We must aggressively reach out to them.